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SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR OES/OA, OES/OMC, AND WHA/CAN
NOAA FOR OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AND NMFS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EFIS](#) [SENV](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS ISSUES FROM THE
DEPUTY MINISTER

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Summary: Charge and ESTOFFS paid a courtesy call April 1 on Department of Fisheries and Oceans Deputy Minister Larry Murray, who reviewed a range of bilateral fisheries and oceans issues. Among the topics discussed were U.S. participation in NAFO and our request for an allocation of Yellowtail Flounder, ocean policy talks, Canada's upcoming high seas conference, the Tulsequah Chief Mine, Machias Seal Island, and the 2005 Atlantic seal hunt. End Summary.

NAFO/YELLOWTAIL FLOUNDER

[1](#)3. (SBU) Murray commented that Canada welcomes a continued strong U.S. role in NAFO, the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization. The GOC, he said, is continuing to look for ways to accommodate the long-standing U.S. request for an allocation of Yellowtail Flounder (YT) in the NAFO regulatory area. He noted that Canada had previously offered 500 metric tons of YT to U.S. fishers, on condition that the fish be processed at Canadian plants, while the U.S. has requested 1000 metric tons to be landed in Nova Scotia and shipped overland to New England for processing. Murray added that the GOC is under great pressure from the Canadian fishing industry not to give up any allocations, although he acknowledged that scientific assessments confirm that the YT stock is healthy and growing. Nevertheless, Murray said that an Ecological Assessment may be necessary if any licenses or allocations are transferred. Another option, Murray said, may be to transfer an allocation of whiting to U.S. fishers. The upcoming U.S.-Canada fisheries bilats in July will provide an opportunity to discuss this matter further, Murray suggested.

OCEANS POLICY TALKS

[1](#)4. (SBU) Murray noted that Admiral James D. Watkins (ret.) was coming to Ottawa on April 12 for an unofficial briefing on the report prepared by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. Murray said he had agreed to meet with NOAA Administrator Lautenbacher to move to government-to-government talks after that, either in Washington or Ottawa. Given the specific mention of oceans policy in the Security and Prosperity Partnership, Murray said it would be useful to schedule meetings fairly quickly after the Watkins visit.

HIGH SEAS CONFERENCE

[1](#)5. (SBU) Murray said there has been great interest in the GOC's plans for a conference on high seas fishing, to be held in May in St. John's, Newfoundland. He said the GOC is currently working on a draft declaration, which will be used to launch the conference. The conference itself, he said, will produce a final report that will address a strategy for controlling overfishing on the high seas.

TULSEQUAH CHIEF MINE

[1](#)6. (SBU) Regarding plans by the Canadian mining company Red Fern to build a road and re-open a mine in the Taku River basin, which could impact on an Alaskan salmon fishery, Murray said the DFO review process would probably be completed in a few weeks. He offered to give Emboffs advance notice of how it would come out. Murray noted that it was unlikely DFO would change the outcome of a permitting process that took 10 years the first time around. He said he understood the concerns of Alaskan and First Nations opponents, but thought the proposed changes in the road would not warrant reversing the mine project.

MACHIAS SEAL ISLAND

17. (SBU) Murray said that the effort to get lobster fishermen to resolve their differences in the disputed area is not working, and asked if there was some forum to discuss the practical fisheries management issues between the governments. He said that this approach would allow the governments to come up with a plan to avoid lost fishing gear, minimize the prospect of violence, and manage the resource.

2005 ATLANTIC SEAL HUNT

18. (SBU) This year's hunt, Murray said, is off to a slow start because of ice conditions. Murray portrayed DFO as occupying a middle ground, in-between animal rights activists opposed to the hunt and fishermen who want to increase the number of seals taken annually. He said the hunt is scientifically justifiable and sustainable as long as the populations in the Gulf of St. Lawrence stay above 3.8 million individuals. Currently, he said, there are about 5 million seals in the Gulf. This year's total allowable catch, the final year of a three year plan, is set at 319,000 seals. Murray said that next season the GOC will implement a new, five-year plan. Murray noted that the seal skins are marketed mainly in Scandinavia, Russia and China, and that DFO is committed to full utilization of the pelts. He acknowledged that only about 30 percent of the animal carcasses are processed for meat and blubber, citing the high cost of quickly getting the skinned seals from remote ice floes to processing plants.

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